VEGETATION CLASSIFICATION AND SURVEY

International Association for Vegetation Science (IAVS)

Vegetation Classification and Survey 4: 1–6
doi: 10.3897/VCS.100394

EDITORIAL

Vegetation Classification and Survey in the third year

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Published 13 January 2023

Abstract

We report on the completed third volume of Vegetation Classification and Survey (VCS). VCS has been included in the Scopus bibliometric database and will receive its first CiteSore in mid-2023. We announce the 2022 Editors' Award for a paper selected from the four papers nominated for Editors' Choice during 2022. We selected Liu et al. (2022; Vegetation Classification and Survey 3: 121–144) for the Editors' Award. This author team developed a comprehensive hierarchical classification system for the steppe vegetation over China. We present five Special Collections (two concluded and three ongoing) which form a backbone for VCS. Apart from Research Papers, Long and Short Database Reports were the prevailing article category in 2022. By contrast, there were no VCS Methods paper in 2022, and thus we encourage submissions particularly in this category. Finally, we welcome new members to the Editorial Board and open a call for free applications for our Editorial Review Board or as a Linguistic Editor.

Abbreviations: APC = article processing charge; IAVS = International Association for Vegetation Science; VCS = Vegetation Classification and Survey.

Keywords

article processing charge, bibliometry, CiteScore, Editorial Review Board, Editors' Award, gold open access, International Association for Vegetation Science (IAVS), publication trend, scientific journal, Scopus, vegetation classification, Web of Science

Introduction

With this editorial, we open the fourth volume of Vegetation Classification and Survey (VCS), a gold open access journal of the International Association for Vegetation Science (IAVS). The third volume was successfully completed due to the efforts of Subject Editors, Linguistic Editors, reviewers, publisher and, of course, the authors. We use this opportunity to report on the journal development in 2022, highlight some outstanding publications in 2022 and provide an outlook for the new year.

Development of VCS in 2022

When we started the journal in 2020, we anticipated that the first few years would be challenging, particularly due to the article processing charges (APCs), which most authors within this field are unfamiliar with, and that new journals do not have an Impact Factor in their first few years (Jansen et al. 2020). However, despite these challenges, we managed the first two years better than expected. In part because, the International Association for Vegetation Science (IAVS) waived APCs for its members

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while VCS awaits to be assigned an Impact Factor (Willner et al. 2021; Dengler et al. 2022).

From the first to the second year, article numbers (+14%) and page numbers (+41%) grew significantly. In the third year (2022), we saw a slight decrease to 23 articles (–8%) and 296 pages (–5%). At first glance, this might appear a bit disappointing. However, when comparing our position with the development of other international journals of vegetation science, geobotany and ecology in general, VCS is doing well (Figure 1). Contrary to the widespread assumption that the number of published articles would inevitably grow from year to year, none of the 10 compared journals reached their maximum annual output in 2022. Preslia, Folia Geobotanica and Phytocoenologia essentially showed a decreasing trend during the whole five-year period. The three general ecological journals (Journal of Ecology, Ecography and Journal of Biogeography) peaked in 2019 and decreased since then, while the other vegetation ecological journals (Journal of Vegetation Science, Applied Vegetation Science, Tuexenia) peaked in 2020 and decreased afterwards. Only VCS and Flora had their peak in 2021. From all compared journals the decrease in 2022 compared to the all-time maximum was lowest in VCS (–8%) and also relatively weak in our sister journal Applied Vegetation Science (–17%). The other journals had marked decreases of at least 25%, with Phytocoenologia (–62%) showing the greatest decrease. These general tendencies might have different reasons. First, the overall declining trend of publication numbers in the serious ecological journals might reflect that the number of publication outlets is growing faster than the production of articles. Additionally, some authors seem to prefer now open access journals with dubious peer review where one can "compensate" lack of quality with payment of APCs – as evidenced by the fact that journals of publishers with such practices have drastically grown in content in the same time. Second, the Covid-19 pandemic may have prevented many field ecologists to work in the field in 2020 and partly also 2021, enabling them to write up older studies, whereas in 2022 they were out in the field again to collect new data. While an in-depth analysis of the causes behind the observed patterns is beyond the scope of this editorial, the fact that VCS managed to decouple itself largely from the general trends – despite it has no Impact Factor yet – makes us optimistic for the future.

While the journal has applied for inclusion in the Web of Science Core Collection and the application is currently under review, it has already been accepted in Scopus, the largest bibliometric database globally, in early 2022. Not only the new content but all articles from the start are now included in this database. Since late 2022, the freely accessible Scopus journal database (Scopus Preview: Sources) provides a monthly updated CiteScoreTracker, which is the "forecast" for the first CiteScore of VCS to be published in mid-2023.

Outstanding papers in 2022

In 2021, VCS introduced the quarterly Editors' Choice and the overall annual Editors' Award to highlight outstanding papers (Dengler et al. 2022). The Editors' Award is selected among the four Editors' Choice papers from that year. Both

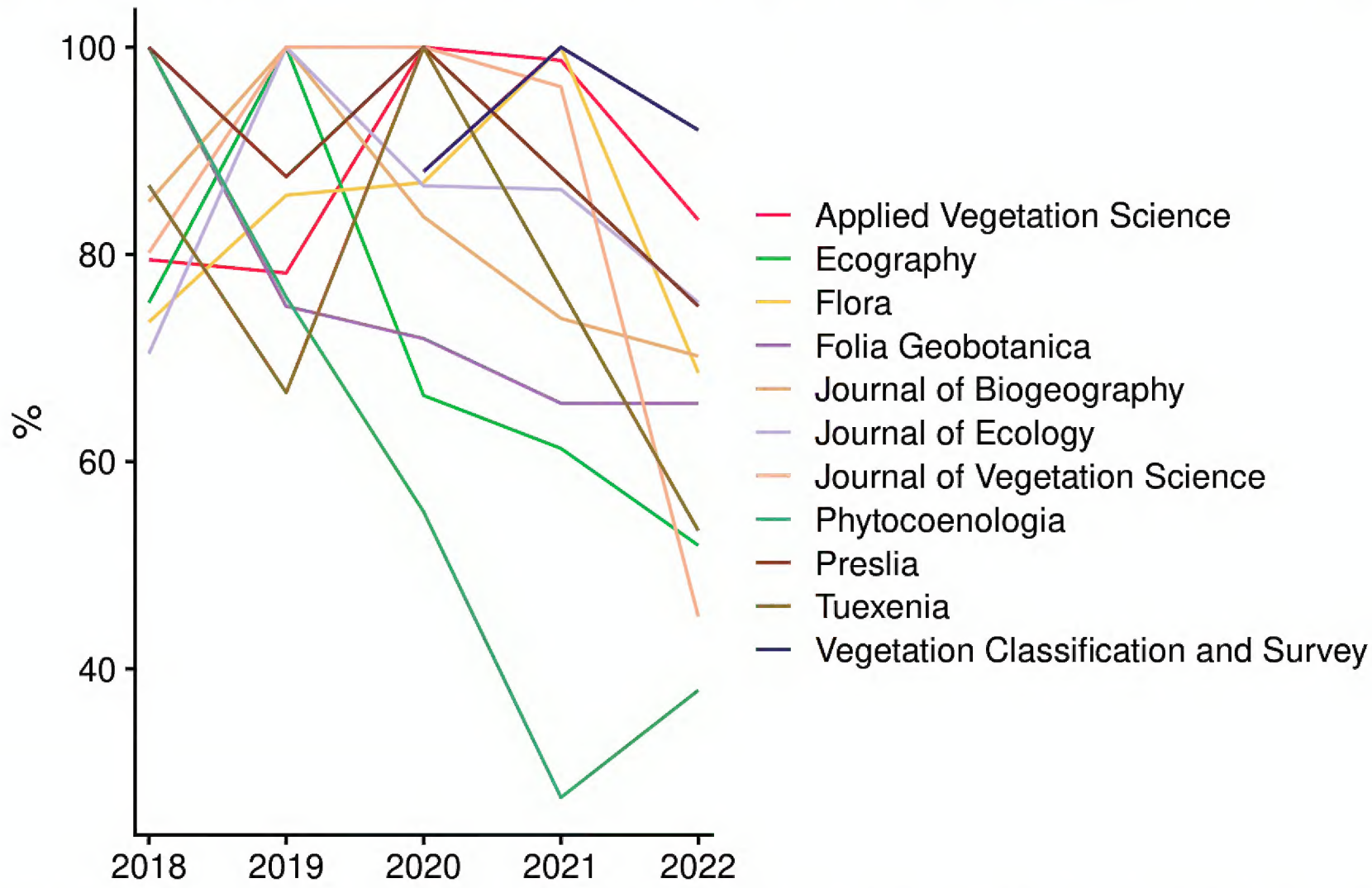

Figure 1. Number of articles per year from 2018 to 2022 for Vegetation Classification and Survey compared to other international journals of vegetation science, geobotany and ecology. The numbers for each journal are scaled to its respective maximum in this period. The numbers were generally taken from the Web of Science (WoS) Core Collection on 31 December 2022. Only for Tuexenia, the numbers were extracted from the journal homepage as the databasing in WoS turned out to be incomplete and inconsistent.

types of articles are permanently labelled as such with a banner in the online presentation of the journal. Both are also highlighted in various media of VCS, namely the VCS Newsletter, the News section on the VCS website and the vegsciblog of IAVS. In addition, The Editors' Award comes with the right to provide the photos or other illustrations for the cover of the respective VCS volume, and the first author receives a certificate and prize from the publisher.

The 2022 Editors' Award goes to Changcheng Liu and colleagues for their broadscale classification paper of *Stipa*-dominated steppes in China, who also won the Editors' Choice of the second quarter (Liu et al. 2022). Based on high-quality data of 1,337 vegetation plots distributed across all grassland areas of China and adjacent Mongolia, the authors developed a hierarchical classification system compatible with the "International Vegetation Classification" (EcoVeg approach; Faber-Langendoen et al. 2014). With cluster analyses, followed by statistical indicator species determination, they could assign the Chinese steppes to five biogeographic groups, 26 alliances and 91 associations plus 12 communities. This is not only an important contribution to the project "Vegetation of China" where it shows how former subjective expert classifications can be replaced by data-driven more objective classifications, but also because it fills a major gap for a comprehensive treatment of all steppes of the Palaearctic.

The Editors' Choice of the first quarter went to Miguel Alvarez and Federico Luebert for their attempt to develop a crossroad between the Braun-Blanquet approach and the EcoVeg approach in the case of Chile's vegetation (Alvarez and Luebert 2022). This paper provides a current synthesis on the known vegetation types of the country and thus lays the groundwork for further studies to fill gaps as well as international comparisons.

The Editors' Choice of the third quarter went to Nicola Alessi and colleagues for their Long Database Report (LDR) of AMS-VegBank, a new Italian vegetation-plot database associated with the University of Bologna (Alessi et al. 2022). This database fills major data gaps in Italy and was presented in an exemplary manner that can serve as prototype for LDRs of other databases.

Finally, the Editors' Choice of the fourth quarter went to Javier Loid and colleagues for their "Review and Synthesis" paper on a re-definition of the terrestrial biomes of the globe (Loidi et al. 2022). Following their review on biome definitions (and related concepts) in the literature, which had been selected as Editors' Choice one year ago (Hunter et al. 2021), they now set up to define nine biomes and 20 subbiomes *de novo*, building on the previous concepts. The units are well defined and characterised in detail. A map shows their spatial distribution and thus facilitates the application in global studies of vegetation ecology and macroecology.

Collections and article types

The first two Special Collections were completed in 2021. The Special Collection **Classification of grasslands and other open vegetation types in the Palaearctic** comprises eight articles and 176 pages and has been concluded with an editorial which does not only introduce the contributions but also reviews the quite heterogeneous knowledge state of broad-scale classification of open habitats in different parts of the Palaearctic (Nowak et al. 2022). The Special Collection **The ‚International Vegetation Classification' initiative: case studies, syntheses, and perspectives on ecosystem diversity around the globe** also contains eight papers with 146 pages, but is still waiting for its concluding editorial. We would like to highlight the two studies that aimed at providing cross-walks between classification systems derived with the two main classification approaches that are currently applied around the globe, Braun-Blanquet approach and EcoVeg approach: Willner and Faber-Langendoen (2021) did this for Europe and Alvarez and Luebert (2022) for Chile, both showing that ultimately these two approaches are not that disjunct so that in the medium future there is hope for a convergence into a uniform system.

VCS has initiated three new Special Collections to stimulate vegetation classification on the three most diverse continents, which are usually underrepresented in international journals (details to be found on the journal website under https://vcs.pensoft.net/collections):

- **African vegetation studies** (edited by Reginald Tang Guuroh, Miguel Alvarez, Leslie Brown, Manfred Finckh, Ute Schmiedel, Gaolathe Tsheboeng & Jürgen Dengler)
- **Grasslands of Asia** (edited by Jürgen Dengler, Idoia Biurrun, Alireza Naqinezhad & Arkadiusz Nowak)
- **Neotropical vegetation** (edited by Gwendolyn Peyre, Bianca Andrade, Alejandro Velazquez & Melisa Giorgis)

All three are produced together with Regional Sections and Working Groups of IAVS and have already published first papers, and more are in the peer-review process. While submissions for the first and last Special Collections have closed, papers still can be proposed and submitted for **Grasslands of Asia**.

Among the article types, we would like to highlight the **Database Reports**, resulting from an exclusive collaboration with the Global Index of Vegetation-Plot Databases (GIVD; Dengler et al. 2011; www.givd.info). There were three Short Database Reports and four Long Database Reports in 2022. Both formats offer authors a way to present their regional or topical vegetation-plot database with its key features, thus can attract collaborators to use their data, while the authors in turn get citations when data from the database are used. Moreover, GIVD provides the unique database IDs that are used in the two largest vegetation-plot databases globally, European Vegetation Archive (EVA; Chytrý et al. 2016) and sPlot (Bruelheide et al. 2019).

A second article type, which is very attractive to authors and readers as it can make a large scientific impact, are methodological papers, called **VCS Methods** in our journal. No VCS Methods paper was published in 2022, but there was one in 2021 (Janišová et al. 2021) on sampling vegetation together with farmer interviews, highlighted in our last editorial (Dengler et al. 2022), and there is one that is published in early 2023: Dengler et al. (2023) present the Ecological Indicator Values for Europe (EIVE), a comprehensive indicator values system for nearly 15,000 vascular plant taxa in Europe and adjacent areas which they derived by mathematically matching the information of 31 source systems from across Europe into a single consensus system. While this system was mainly developed to support continent-wide classification and macroecological studies of vegetation, first tests indicate that it also might work well in regional contexts. The wide use and further development of EIVE is facilitated by the fact that the database is published open access. These are just two examples how a VCS Methods paper could look, and we would like to see many more submissions in this category in the future. These Methods papers could address methods at any step of the workflow, from the field sampling through data management and harmonisation to classification and ordination methods. Likewise, such papers could present new methods, compare different methods or provide tools to implement existing methods.

Changes in the Editorial Board

The Editorial Board of VCS consists of the Chief Editors, the Associate Editors, the Guest Editors, the Linguistic Editors and the Editorial Review Board. The latter are those experts from around the world who serve as primary pool of reviewers as they know the journal and are committed to it, thus usually provide better and faster reviews than reviewers from outside. We are happy to announce that as of 2023 we have appointed four new members to the Editorial Review Board: Manfred Finckh (University of Hamburg, Germany), Changcheng Liu (Institute of Botany, Chinese Academy of Sciences, Beijing, China), Ricarda Pätsch (Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic) and Dariia Shyriaieva (M.G. Kholodny Institute of Botany National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, Kyiv, Ukraine & Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic).

Linguistic Editors are a unique feature offered by VCS. These are ecologists or botanists with English as their first language (or otherwise excellent knowledge of scientific English). Where a paper has been accepted and the author team do not have English as a first language, the paper is reviewed for clarity and composition by one of our Linguistic Editors who then reviews the written work for correctness and clarity – at no charge to the authors. This service ensures that written language is not a negative-discriminating feature in our journal, but authors from all around the world equally can publish well-written articles. We are much indebted to our team of Linguistic Editors who did a great job again in 2022 (see below). We particularly thank Emmeline Topp who served the journal from the start but now resigned because of other duties. We welcome Hallie Seiler from California, now based at Zurich University of Applied Sciences, Wädenswil, Switzerland, as her successor.

A warm welcome to all new members of the Editorial Board!

Call for new Editorial Board members

Since VCS is growing, we are seeking colleagues interested in serving in our Editorial Board. As we aim to be as diverse and dynamic as the vegetation on the globe, we particularly encourage people based outside Europe, early-career researchers and women to apply.

Our Editorial Board members provide volunteer service to the journal, both by their reviewing/editing services and by recommending the journal and its articles to other colleagues. We expect our Editorial Board members to be familiar with the scope and publishing practice of the journal. In exchange, we present the names of the Editorial Board members (https://vcs.pensoft.net/board/). The Editorial Board members are invited to the editorial meetings of VCS and receive the VCS Newsletter, thus get first-hand information on the journal development, and can contribute with their own ideas. We seek candidates for the Editorial Review Board and the Linguistic Editor team. By contrast, new Associate Editors are selected from the Guest Editors and the Editorial Review Board who performed a particularly good service.

Editorial Review Board members need to have their PhD completed, have topical first-author paper(s) published in international journals and preferentially also some experience as peer reviewer.

Linguistic Editors should be have English as a first language or have linguistic skills on a comparable level. They do not need to have a PhD but should be well familiar with the style of scientific writing in ecology and botany.

Please send your application until 31 March 2023 to Jürgen Dengler, with a cover letter briefly explaining why you are interested in joining the Editorial Board of this specific journal and specifying whether you apply for the Editorial Review Board or as Linguistic Editor. Please attach a short CV. If applying for the Editorial Review Board, we would specifically like to know your previous experience with (a) first-authored papers written in English, (b) review services and (c) possibly other editor experiences. If you have a well-curated Web of Science Researcher (formerly Publons) profile (e.g. https://www.webofscience.com/wos/author/record/765401), including the Review section, you could most conveniently send just a link. If applying as Linguistic Editor, please explain your previous experience in editing scientific texts for clarity and composition.

Outlook

The further development of VCS depends on you, the readers, authors and Editorial Board members of the journal. Thanks to the generosity of IAVS, the offer of full exemption from APCs could be extended until 30 June 2023 (date of original submission counts). Please use the time until then to submit new exciting manuscripts in any category. Specifically, it is still possible to propose contributions to the ongoing Special Collection **Grasslands of Asia** (see https://vcs.pensoft.net/collection/317/), or you can contact the Chief Editors if you wish to propose a new Special Collection, such as in conjunction with an IAVS Working Group or a conference of IAVS and its subgroups. We also would like you to browse the exciting articles that have already been published in the first three years of VCS and cite them where appropriate or recommend them to colleagues. Both are crucial for a small and new journal not yet widely known. Finally, in mid-2023, VCS will get its first CiteScore from Scopus and has a good chance to be included in the Web of Science Core Collection.

Author contributions

J.D. planned and drafted this editorial while all other authors revised and approved it.

Acknowledgements

We thank Megan J. McNellie for linguistic advice.

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Appendix 1

Linguistic Editors for VCS in 2022

We thank the following colleagues for their invaluable contribution as Linguistic Editors for VCS (number of edited papers in brackets):

Stephen Bell (2)
Michael Glaser (3)
Don Faber-Langendoen (3)
Jim Martin (1)
Emmeline Topp (1)
Lynda Weekes (2)

Appendix 2

Reviewers for VCS in 2022

We thank the following colleagues who served during the last year as reviewers for VCS (number of reviews in brackets):

Maged Abutaha (1)
Francisco Alcaraz (1)
Nicola Alessi (1)
Miguel Alvarez (2)
Hugo Bezuidenhout (1)
Loyapin Bondé (1)
Jorge Capelo (3)
Timo Conradi (1)
Ulrich Deil (1)
Sara Del Río González (1)
Marks Ditlhogo (1)
Ahmed El Aich (1)
Cecilia Ezcurra (1)
Don Faber-Langendoen (1)
Federico Fernández-González (1)
Scott Franklin (2)
Antonio Galán de Mera (1)
François Gillet (1)
Francisco Maiato Pedro Gonçalves (1)
Riccardo Guarino (1)
Michal Hájek (1)
Rense Haveman (1)
John Hunter (1)
Florian Jansen (2)
Keotshephile Kashe (1)
Ingo Koska (1)
Anna Kuzemko (1)
Attila Lengyel (1)
Zdeňka Lososová (1)
Federico Luebert (1)
Daniel Montesinos Tubée (1)
Theo Mostert (2)
Alireza Naqinezhad (1)
Jens Oldeland (1)
Hana Petersen (1)
Rasmus Revermann (2)
Simona Sarmati (1)
Ute Schmiedel (1)
Urban Šilc (1)
Sebastian Świerszcz (1)
José Tchamba (1)
Gaolathe Tsheboeng (1)
Andri Van Aardt (1)
Kiril Vassilev (1)
Jose Alejandro Velazquez Montes (2)
Viktoria Wagner (2)
Karsten Wesche (1)
David Zelený (1)